

Indigenous Peoples and Nations as Part of the "Subject-Object" of the Study of Political Science*

[English Version]

Los pueblos y naciones indígenas como parte del «objeto-sujeto» de estudio de la ciencia política

Povos indígenas e nações como parte do "objeto-sujeto" dos estudos de ciência política

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Abstract

Objective: To reflect upon the objects of study of political science in Latin America to understand the limitations arising from research on issues related to indigenous peoples in the region under this discipline. **Methodology:** A literature review on critical epistemologies was conducted and a corpus of empirical and meta-theoretical studies on political science as a discipline was created. **Results:** The majority of studies in political science tend toward a positivist, quantitative and empiricist approach.

This trend is consistent with U.S political science which molds the predominant approach of this discipline supported by the contributions of epistemologies of the South and decolonial theories for rethinking political science in Latin America.

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Conclusions: Indigenous peoples are absent subjects from the hegemonic perspective of political science, in terms of Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009; 2010). Therefore, a first step to decolonize (from a decolonial theoretical perspective) the sciences—in particular, political science—is to claim the importance of studying these subjects.

Keywords: coloniality; absent subjects; political science; indigenous people.

Resumen

Objetivo: reflexionar sobre los objetos de estudio de la ciencia política en América Latina en aras de comprender las limitaciones que surgen a la hora de investigar bajo esta disciplina temáticas relacionadas con los pueblos indígenas en la región. **Metodología:** se realizó una revisión bibliográfica de estudios sobre epistemologías críticas y se conformó un corpus de análisis compuesto por antecedentes empíricos y meta-teóricos de estudios sobre la ciencia política como disciplina. **Resultados:** se encontró que los estudios mayoritarios en ciencia política tienden hacia un enfoque positivista, cuantitativo y empirista. Esta tendencia es afín a lo que sucede en la ciencia política estadounidense, que es el lugar desde donde se configura el enfoque predominante en la disciplina. Se sostiene que las epistemologías del sur y las teorías decoloniales realizan un aporte para repensar a la ciencia política en América Latina. **Conclusiones:** los sujetos indígenas son sujetos ausentes desde la mirada hegemónica de la politología, en los términos en los que señala Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009; 2010). Por ello, un primer paso para descolonizar (en el sentido de los teóricos decoloniales) las ciencias —en particular, la ciencia política— es reivindicar la importancia que tiene el estudio acerca de dichos sujetos.

Palabras clave: colonialidad; sujetos ausentes; ciencia política; indígenas.

Resumo

Objetivo: Refletir sobre os objetos de estudo da ciência política na América Latina, a fim de compreender as limitações que surgem ao pesquisar questões relacionadas aos povos indígenas na região sob esta disciplina. **Metodologia:** Foi realizada uma revisão bibliográfica de estudos sobre epistemologias críticas e foi formado um corpo de análise composto de estudos empíricos e metateóricos de fundo sobre a ciência política como disciplina. **Resultados:** Verificou-se que a maioria dos estudos

em ciência política tende para uma abordagem positivista, quantitativa e empírica. Esta tendência é semelhante ao que acontece na ciência política americana, que é o lugar onde a abordagem predominante na disciplina é moldada. Argumenta-se que as epistemologias do sul e as teorias descoloniais contribuem para repensar a ciência política na América Latina. **Conclusões:** Os sujeitos indígenas são sujeitos ausentes do olhar hegemônico da ciência política, nos termos em que Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009; 2010) aponta. Portanto, um primeiro passo para descolonizar (no sentido dos teóricos descoloniais) as ciências - em particular a ciência política - é reivindicar a importância do estudo destas matérias.

Palavras chave: colonialidade; temas ausentes; ciência política; povos indígenas.

Introduction

Political science was born as a result of the social sciences' division in the 19th century (Wallerstein, 1996). This process refers to a positivist paradigm of the sciences, which presents a universal criterion to differentiate between scientific knowledge and non-scientific knowledge. This criterion is valid for both natural sciences and social sciences, whereas philosophy is placed outside the scientific field.

Within this framework, political science has taken up the positivist paradigm since its emergence and, even today it is still the most used paradigm. Although in recent decades other epistemologies have emerged from the global South questioning the positivist paradigm and its universal criterion of "truth."

The epistemologies of the South and the postcolonial and decolonial paradigms consider that a universally valid scientific method makes other types of knowledge and knowledge production existing in latitudes beyond Western Europe invisible.

These epistemologies are a critique of the Eurocentrism that prevails in the ways of knowledge production in academia and call for a decolonial thinking. Thus, political science is imbued with this positivist paradigm and its concomitant Eurocentric vision.

This paper argues the hypothesis that in the delimitation of the objects of study of political science there are processes resulting in topics and subjects becoming invisible, which have not been taken into account by the discipline despite their relevance and relationship with some central concepts for the subject since its constitution.

In particular, the problem of the topics studied by political science in Latin America and how this topic selection is permeated by an Eurocentric vision of knowledge is addressed. The analysis aims to argue that the indigenous peoples and the "indigenous issue" are relevant to political science and draws attention to the assumptions behind the assertion that this issue is mainly the object of study of anthropology, archaeology, and history, or secondarily, of sociology.

Methodology

An empirical and metatheoretical corpus of analysis on political science as a discipline was created and a critical analysis was conducted based on the theoretical framework on critical epistemologies.

This corpus was comprised of 594 articles and reviews, selected on the basis of a descriptive analysis of the scientific production in political science whose object of study or theme was “the indigenous.” For this purpose, 149 scientific research journals in political science or public administration belonging to institutions in Latin America or Spain, indexed in Latindex, Redalyc, Biblat, and/or Scielo from 1982 (the year of the first work registered on indigenous issues) to 2018 were reviewed. Based on the relevant theoretical contributions of the epistemologies of the South and the theories, scopes, and approaches of political science, the objective was to rethink the discipline *in* and *from* Latin America.

Results

Eurocentrism, Decoloniality, and Epistemology of Absent Subjects

Decolonial perspectives sustain the existence and persistence of colonial relations in those peripheral territories that suffered from colonialism driven by the Central American countries. In other words, the administrative and political independence of the peripheral nation-states did not bring about a transformation of core-peripheral relationships on a worldwide scale. These relationships were characterized by the “[...] international division of labor between core and periphery [and by] [...] the ethnic/racial hierarchization of populations” (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 13).

Thus, there is a difference between the concepts of “coloniality” and “colonialism.” As previously mentioned, “colonialism” refers to a political-administrative system of imperial domination of one country toward other territories. From these perspectives, colonialism is constituted as a world system from the conquest and colonization of America from 1492 onward. The concept is also used to describe imperial relations between “metropolis” and “colony,” not only between Europe and America, but also between Europe and territories in Africa and Asia. The end of colonialism implies political independence and the formation of nation-states of colonized territories (Gigena, 2013).

However, the colonization of America is a process that begins together with the constitution of the capitalist world-economy. Both historical processes are mutually constitutive. Since colonization, production relationships have been based on a global racial/ethnic hierarchy, giving rise to an international division of labor between the populations of the Central American countries (metropolises) and those of the peripheral countries (colonies). Within this framework, the notion of "coloniality" describes the process by which "[...] the international division of labor networked a series of power hierarchies: ethno-racial, spiritual, epistemic, sexual, and gender relations" (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 19).

Therefore, the end of colonialism did not signify the end of coloniality. Decolonial authors are currently witnessing "[...] a transition from a modern/colonial to global/colonial world-system" (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 13). This statement emphasizes that the political-administrative independence did not transform the structure of core-periphery domination.

Thus, these perspectives revisit Aníbal Quijano (2000), who discusses the concept of "Modernity" based on European philosophies and theories. Quijano places the origins of Modernity in the Conquest of America and argues that for "the modern" to exist, there must be something that is defined as "non-modern." This process created a racial hierarchization of the world's populations, where Europe is placed as superior, the center. This process consists of structuring a pattern of world power called "coloniality of power." Consequently, modernity is not an intra-European phenomenon, but rather a manifestation based on the superiority of the European over the non-European. This process resulted in the subalternization of knowledge and cultures of those who were not produced under the modern Western European paradigm (Baquero and Rico, 2013).

On the basis of the principle of racial classification, the superiority of white populations was not only manifested, but also stated on the types of knowledge produced in and from Europe. Thus, the European colonialism was political-administrative and constituted a system of thought that advocated for the European moral and intellectual superiority. This view of European superiority over the rest of the world is called "eurocentrism" (Quijano, 2000).

Eurocentrism, a type of ethnocentrism, states that modern Europe seems to predate the historical constitution of the pattern of power, the process of conquest and colonization. Therefore, Eurocentrism is "[...] a colonial attitude toward knowledge, articulated simultaneously with the process of core-periphery relationships and racial/ethnic hierarchies" (Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 20). This system excludes, silences, and omits other different types of knowledge of those that sustain the principles of universal

modern rationality. Eurocentrism is the type of knowledge of Western modernity. As Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel (2007) state:

Subaltern knowledges were excluded, omitted, silenced and ignored. Since the Enlightenment, in the 18th century, silencing was legitimized by the idea that such knowledges represented a mythical, inferior, pre-modern, and prescientific stage of human knowledge. Only the knowledge generated by the scientific and philosophical elite of Europe was considered “true” knowledge, since it was capable of abstracting from its own spatio-temporal conditioning to place itself on a neutral platform of observation (p. 20).

These authors follow Quijano and state that “[...] colonial power relations are not only limited to the economic-political and juridical-administrative domination of the centers over the peripheries, but also have an epistemic, i.e., cultural dimension” (Castro Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 19). That is, there is a privilege of Western culture over all others.

In this line, Lander (2000) affirms that modern social knowledge is sustained by the metanarrative of Modernity. In the author’s words:

This meta-narrative of modernity is a device of colonial and imperial knowledge in which the totality of peoples, time and space is articulated as part of the colonial/imperial organization of the world. A form of organization and being of society is transformed by this colonizing device of knowledge into the “normal” form of the human being and society. The other ways of being, the other forms of organization of society and knowledge are transformed not only into different, but also into lacking, archaic, primitive, traditional, and premodern forms. They are placed in an earlier moment in the historical development of humanity, which within the imaginary of progress emphasizes their inferiority (p. 10).

Based on this diagnosis, the author detects that the social sciences in Latin America functioned based on the contrast with the European experience instead of dealing with the knowledge of the historical-cultural specificities of Latin American societies. This critique of the coloniality of knowledge has been taken up again in this region by the social sciences in the last two decades. This knowledge also implied rethinking in epistemic and methodological terms, as well as in terms of subjects that are recognized as producers of knowledge and not only as objects. It is argued that political science is still lagging behind when it comes to incorporating the critique of the coloniality of knowledge. It is also invited to open the umbrella toward specific subjects-objects of study of

Latin American societies. In particular, the study of/with indigenous peoples and nations is unavoidable. For his part, the Portuguese sociologist Boaventura de Sousa Santos presents a perspective that complements this critical vision of Eurocentrism. The author contrasts the dominant epistemologies of the global North with an epistemology of the South.

For De Sousa Santos (2010), modern Western thought is an abysmal thought, founded on an invisible line that separates metropolitan societies and colonial territories. The former are on the visible side, while the latter are made invisible. Modern knowledge is a consummate form of this abyssal thinking. In this framework, popular, secular, plebeian, peasant or indigenous knowledge are not valid forms of knowledge from the point of view of abyssal thinking.

The sociologist understands modern science as just another form of knowledge, and not the only one; moreover, he claims the validity of knowledge discarded by hegemonic scientific knowledge and formulates an epistemology of absent knowledge, which postulates that "Social practices are knowledge practices. Practices that are not grounded in science are not ignorant ones, but rather practices of alternative rival knowledge" (De Sousa Santos, 2009, p. 88).

In a similar vein, decolonial theorists express that the first decolonization (juridical-administrative) must be followed by a second decolonization, which they call "decoloniality." It consists of a long-term process of resignification of ethnic, racial, sexual, epistemic, economic and gender relations. A hetero-ethnicity of these multiple relations is necessary. To this end, a new language and new concepts must be developed to account for the complexity between the hierarchies of these relations. Therefore, the proposal is "To enter into dialogue with non-Western forms of knowledge that see the world as a totality in which everything is related to everything" (Castro Gómez and Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 17). With a view to seeking civilizing alternatives, Lander (2000) proposes to question the pretension of universal truth that social sciences wield, since they are one of the main mechanisms of naturalization and legitimization of the current colonial and neoliberal social order.

North American and Latin American Political Science

This section reviews the predominant theories and objects of study in Latin American political science. To this end, metatheoretical studies that focus on the history of Latin American political science and reflect on the discipline itself are presented.

Fernando Barrientos del Monte (2009) distinguishes three periods in Latin American political science. The first period, prior to the 1960s, is called the “juridical-institutionalist period.” It is characterized by the study of norms and laws and is based on classical institutionalism, so that the empirical object of political science is not yet distinguished from law. Then, the author points to the “sociological period,” since the predominant approaches are Marxist and structural functionalist. At this stage (60s and 70s), it is still difficult to differentiate the studies that come from history, economics, and sociology from those that are properly political science. For the author, it is from the return to democracies in the 1980s that political science in Latin America began to study political institutions and have a differentiated empirical object.

For her part, Victoria Murillo (2015) analyzes the history of American political science and its repercussions in Latin America. The author associates the predominant scientific theories with United States foreign policy and worries about the lack of contextualization of theories, where globalization has as its banner an apparent “uniformity” of the world.

The political scientist argues that there is little interest in understanding how globalization affects political science and that even from the United States academy there is no incentive to contextualization. The above, despite the fact that political science in the United States has had an “exacerbated attention” for the rest of the world since the postwar period.

Thus, the theory of modernization arose in the North in the context of the Cold War, where the government was eager to obtain information about the rest of the world. This theory sustained “[...] a normative effort to drive capitalist democracy to what was labeled as the ‘less developed’ world” (Murillo, 2015, p. 578). The author notes that the policies that were promoted from the theory of modernization were associated with the “Alliance for Progress.”

Years later, in the 70s and 80s, neoinstitutionalist theories (historical institutionalism and rational choice institutionalism) experienced a boom in United States political science. These theories focused on how institutions constrain human action. This line supports the policies and institutions promoted by the Washington Consensus, which promoted structural institutional reforms and generated incentives that sanctioned human action to achieve “economic development” (Murillo, 2015).

Murillo (2015) points out that neoinstitutionalist theories are associated with the policies promoted by the Washington Consensus insofar as they propose economic reforms that tend to make Latin America achieve more prosperous markets and “economic development.” According to the author, the impact of these reforms was not as expected. This, in part, was due to the institutional weaknesses that hindered the achievement of the objectives. It should be noted

that considering "institutional weakness" as a variable to explain the obstacle to "development" reproduces a positivist way of interpreting political phenomena. It would be worth paying attention to the contextual, cultural and academic conditions that allow these modes of understanding political phenomena to be taken for granted.

Regarding the objects of study and methodology, in the existing bibliography on the subject, the authors agree that the majority of studies in political science generally tend toward a quantitative and empiricist approach. This tendency is similar to what happens in United States political science, which is the predominant place from where the predominant approach in the discipline is configured. Giovanni Sartori (2005) is concerned about this eagerness to quantify, as he considers that this process leads to a false precision and irrelevance of the studies. The author criticizes the mold of the United States political science.

In a similar vein, Murillo draws attention to the difficulty of "field studies" to understand political science phenomena:

The emphasis on method is particularly troubling in this case given the limitation to conduct field experiments for the study of many important issues in political science, such as wars, revolutions, recessions, democratization, and military coups, to name but a few. (Murillo, 2015, p. 583).

On the other hand, the work of Santiago Basabe-Serrano and Sergio Huertas-Hernández (2018) is one of the studies that inquiries about the topics mostly studied by the discipline in Latin America. The authors collected articles published in journals in Spanish and Portuguese that are in the JCR or Scimago indexes between 2011 and 2016 that refer to Latin America. They found that the most studied topics are: political parties, electoral processes and democracy. The second group includes studies of the structure, functioning and interactions of legislatures, courts of justice and the executive branch, political theory and public policy. Finally, there are some works that analyze the presence of women in different arenas of political decision-making, the transformations of the State, public opinion studies and political elites.

On his part, Nelson Cardozo (2011) analyzes the history of American political science and its repercussions in Latin America: Brazil, Argentina, and Uruguay, with some references to Chile. The topics studied that he detects in his analysis are: "government," "democracy," "public policies," "social opinions" and "external action of the government."

On the other hand, Simón Pachano (2008) compiles papers presented at the Latin American and Caribbean Congress of Social Sciences held in Quito to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of Flacso in 2007. The political scientist

affirms that in Latin America, studies on democracy, political parties, relations between branches of government, political elites, electoral processes, policy formulation and decision-making processes have multiplied (p. 9).

It should be noted that the work of Pachano (2008) aims to provide a sample of the papers presented at the congress as examples of what is being studied in political science in Latin America today. The author distinguishes four thematic axes: the emergence of new political actors, forms of direct democracy, political reform and the balance of political science. Of the seven papers compiled, three deal with the emergence of new political actors, specifically, actors of “ethnic origin.” In other words, the author identifies the emergence of new actors as a relevant topic for political science in this region. This is an important reference despite the fact that it uses the generic concept “ethnic” and does not refer to indigenous people, although the three works do.

Although these works allow knowing the result of a systematization of the most worked topics in Latin American political science, the dominant criterion in their proposals refers to an accounting and, therefore, displaces interpretations that contemplate qualitative dimensions for the understanding of these choices. For the purpose of this paper, it is worth raising the problematic dimension of this issue, because the possibility of focusing attention on these other dimensions brings the analysis closer to the approaches of decolonial authors.

The following section refers to works that question the idea that Latin American political science academies follow North American political science influences closely. As can be seen, most of the works do deal with the study of “classic” topics; however, there are other approaches.

The Other Side of Political Science in Latin America

The following is a reflection on the theory of dependency, as a counterpart of the theory of modernization. This dependency theory is studied as one of the antecedents of decolonial theories. It then describes the context of the return to democracy in Latin America and the topics of study that aroused the interest of political science. Finally, research on political science and indigenous people is presented.

In Latin America, modernization theory was criticized by dependency theory in the 1970s:

Dependency theory emphasized the interconnectedness involved in power relations between countries and highlighted the possibility of “underdevelopment”

while distinguishing the different types of “peripheries” that had emerged in Latin America given the relationship between internal elites and international markets. (Murillo, 2015, p. 579).

Dependency theory was developed by Latin American theorists such as Cardoso and Faletto (1969) and Theotonio Dos Santos (1970). It is a contribution fundamentally linked to what will later be known as “world-system theories” (Wallerstein, 1979). Faced with the imperialist assumptions of modernization theory, dependency theorists redefined the concepts of “development,” making visible the consequences of this approach for Latin America. These authors came mainly from economics and sociology.

The following stage, in the 80s, was characterized by the return to democracy of Latin American countries where governments that had broken with democratic institutions, led by the armed forces and supported by part of civil society, had been installed. This scenario was propitious for neoinstitutionalist studies, since the main inquiry concerned the new institutional forms that contribute to consolidate democracy. Murillo (2015) argues that in this process there was a lack of contextualization of such theories, since “New institutionalist theory tended to assume that similar formal institutions operated in the same way in diverse contexts” (p. 579). However, the author does not link this fact with the hegemony of the philosophical-epistemological tradition of positivism in Latin American social sciences.

In the framework of the democratic reopening, multiculturalism is established as the dominant discourse on cultural diversity adopted by Latin American states since neoliberalism as a response to various struggles, among them, the Indian-indigenous struggles that had been taking place since the late 70s (Zapata, 2019). These struggles challenged the political system demanding recognition, inclusion, and/or autonomy. In this context, the claims of the Indian-indigenous subjects initiated in previous decades were reactivated in the 80s and 90s, giving rise to what is understood as a re-emergence of the plural indigenous movement, with positions in dialogue and also confronting the new multicultural model (Cruz, 2018). It is worth clarifying that the indigenous demands of this entire period had broader scopes than what has been achieved so far with multicultural policies (Zapata, 2019).

Based on this, the importance of the study of the “indigenous issue” for political science in the region is postulated. There is a long and complex relationship between the State, the Government and indigenous people. Andrea Gigena (2017) points out four milestones that reaffirm the importance that the indigenous issue has had for the State in Latin America:

- The emergence, in the 40s, of a “doctrinal body” that defines the relationship between the State and the indigenous populations;
- the emergence and consolidation of a specific state institutional framework for indigenous peoples (a phenomenon most visible in 1990);
- the emergence of an indigenous bureaucracy: ethno-bureaucracy (Bocacara and Bolados) or plurinational bureaucracy (Soruco Sologuren, 2015);
- the recognition of different modes of indigenous government and self-government throughout Latin America (phenomena that became more visible in the 2000s).

In a subsequent work, Avalo and Gigena (2019) reviewed the proceedings of the Congresses of the Latin American Association of Political Science (Alacip), those of the Congresses of the Argentine Society of Political Analysis, as well as articles published by 149 Latin American and Spanish journals rated as “political science” or “public administration” by the Latindex, Scielo, Biblat and/or Redalyc repositories. It follows that Latin American political science has a lot to say about indigenous people, as was discovered, nearly 300 papers presented at conferences and 592 articles published in journals.

The 592 publications belong to 149 journals and were published between 1982 and 2018. In other words, there are approximately 16 publications per year and almost four publications per journal. Most of these works were produced after 2010 in a context of recognition of indigenous rights in the constitutions of several countries in the region and, in addition, most of the studies refer to the Bolivian process in particular.

Evidencing the existence of these works is a first step to breaking with the hegemonic idea that Latin American political science does not deal with its own issues, such as indigenous peoples. This process is the result of the invisibilization processes referred to by Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel (2007), Lander (2000), Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009; 2010) and the epistemologies of the South in general.

Conclusions

The fact that "classical" or "mainstream" Latin American political science mechanically studies democracy, parties, and institutions without taking into account a long history – the long history of Modernity/coloniality – leads to a reduced vision of the problems and objects. This absence is paradoxical in democratic societies that consider themselves pluri/multicultural. It is understood that such mechanistic view does not refer to a research inertia in the discipline, but is related to conditions, resources and forms of international distribution of knowledge production.

Epistemologies of the south and decolonial theories make a contribution to rethinking political science in Latin America. Indigenous subjects are absent subjects from the hegemonic viewpoint of political science in the terms referred to by Boaventura De Sousa Santos (2009; 2010). Therefore, a first step to decolonize (in the sense of decolonial theorists) the sciences – in particular, political science – is to claim the importance of the study of these subjects.

Furthermore, these epistemologies and theoretical proposals show that using and copying theories and objects of study produced in the center tends to decontextualize research and reproduce situations of inequality and exclusion typical of the Latin American contexts. Secondly, they encourage creating specific theoretical and epistemological frameworks to understand political phenomena from perspectives that question Eurocentric Western Modernity. This problematization does not necessarily imply disregarding what "Eurocentric" political science has developed before, but it does imply putting tension on its hegemonic condition.

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