

# THE DISCOVERY OF THE NEW SUBJECT IN LATIN AMERICAN ETHICS OF LIBERATION<sup>1</sup>

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*New developments in Latin American are dealing with problems of Globalization from a new perspective. As Christian ethics needs to take up the preferential option for the poor, it has to start from the experience of the poor, the marginalized and the excluded. Therefore, the experience of exclusion becomes the starting point of a new ethics of liberation, which focuses on the 'subject', the concrete living human being that can and should be the author of his/her own life's story. So the main task is to build up a society where all can participate as subjects. The first step in this process is to encounter the other in face-to-face relationships, to hear the cry of the victimized and to act in solidarity with them, so that a new social actor arises: social movements from the grassroots as agents of liberating political and social praxis.*

**I**n a time when social dynamics of exclusion (ethnic, cultural and religious dynamics of exclusion, in particular) lead to a rapid increase of violence, as the unrest in the suburbs of Paris in 2005 has for instance demonstrated, ethics is apparently advised to turn to new approaches that address questions of social and economic marginalization. Though at present no longer as popular as it had been 30 years ago, theology of liberation has, after the crisis of the 1990s, some interesting new developments to offer in connection with questions of contextualization and universality, which might make for some impulses for discussion in Europe. The "ethics of the subject" which particularly has been developed in the circle of

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the Departamento Ecu  nico de Investigaciones<sup>2</sup> presents such a prospect. One finds among them well known names from the “classical period of liberation theology”, like Hugo Assmann, Franz J. Hinkelammert, Pablo Richard, Elsa Tamez and also, as their constant partner in dialogue, Enrique Dussel. But aside from these, there is also a young new generation with names like Germ  n Guti  rrez, Jung Mo Sung, Roxana Hidalgo, and so on.

What are these thinkers interested in? With the onslaught of globalization in the last two decades, the poor whose analytic had gone through the school of Paolo Freire’s “pedagogy of the oppressed” and who thus had been thought of having become “revolutionary” subjects, have now lost their role as “historical” subjects. The “end of history” (Francis Fukuyama) has also put an end to the “historical power of the poor” (Gustavo Guti  rrez). Contrary to the attempts of the 1970s and 1980s the present period seems shaped by the “historical powerlessness of the poor amidst a neo-liberalism that has increasingly disallowed any other alternative. Thus the erstwhile silent “cry of the subject” (Franz J. Hinkelammert) becomes the central ethical experience. The failure of existing Marxism also leads to a re-thinking in Latin America that includes, among others, a re-discovery of the resilient and creative potentials of concrete people and communities beyond classical Marxist class concepts. Consequently the “new” liberation theology focuses on “new” subjects of a civil social nature, in particular, those of the *movimientos sociales*, whose aim is to promote a society “in which there is place for all” – the programmatic slogan of the Zapatistas of Mexico: *una sociedad donde quepan todos y todas*. It also promotes an ethics that pursues an explicit universal goal from a particular, partisan starting point.

In order to understand this particular partisan starting point, two considerations are to be clearly taken:

1. This particular partisan starting point does not suggest a practical starting point. It does not mean to indicate that

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2. The Departamento Ecu  nico de Investigaciones (DEI) in San Jos   (Costa Rica) ranks – in cooperation with the *Universidad B  blica Latinoamericana* (UBL) which is likewise located in San Jos   among the well-known places of a renewed theology of liberation. Cf. here among others, S. Silber, *Vielschichtig und lebendig. Neuere Entwicklungen in der Theologie der Befreiung* in *Herder Korrespondenz*, 60 (2006): 523-528.

partisanship for the *excluidos*, (i.e. the poor and marginalized) is the practical way towards achieving universal justice in the same theoretical way that justice could be achieved when one starts from universal human rights. Rather, this starting point in partisanship probes a basis in fundamental theory. The discussion partner for this thinking is not the same as that in the European mode. It is not the fictitious figure of the “radical skeptic”<sup>3</sup> that is being challenged, but what is at stake in the debate is morals itself. Thus, the skeptic loses his moral innocence in the midst of the outcry for injustice. In so maintaining his skeptical stance, he becomes the cynical accomplice of the exploitative system and the skeptical question, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” can no longer remain a mere intellectual mirror game but itself becomes the justification for the death of millions through hunger, disease and violence.

2. In this starting point we are confronted with a radical polarity. Similar to that between rich and poor or that between center and periphery, it is the radical polarity between life and death; only this polarity renders the meaning of the term most concretely. It cannot simply be termed as arbitrary “difference” as in the sense of cultural differentiation. In this regard, the option for the poor is therefore not simply a “preferential” option. It is a categorical option, as the option for life and against death is categorical, as the fundamental demand for justice is an unconditional demand.<sup>4</sup>

Thus Franz J. Hinkelammert makes a distinction between the “utopian capitalism” of thinkers from Adam Smith to Friedrich August Hayek, on the one hand, and “cynical capitalism” of globalisation, on the other. Utopian capitalism at least promised as final goal the good life for all. “Cynical capitalism” does not offer

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3. Cf. H. Schelkshorn, *Diskurs und Befreiung. Studien zur philosophischen Ethik von Karl-Otto Apel und Enrique Dussel* (Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi, 1997), 291.

4. Cf. J.M. Vigil, “La opción por los pobres es opción por la justicia, y no es preferencial. Para un reencuadramiento teológico-sistemático de la OP,” *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* 63 (2004): 255-266.

anything but its own lack of alternative as it posits its own absolute norm and simply assumes without question that total uncompassionate concurrence is a simple anthropological fact.<sup>5</sup> The thinkers of the “ethics of the subject” for their part start from the essential relationality of the person whose development is thought to be based on these foundations of an ethics that is both concerned with the subject and with structures.

## **I. BEING SUBJECT AS RELATIONSHIP IN CORPOREALITY**

Enrique Dussel, who has developed his concept of the subject and his ethics in intensive discussion with more recent European philosophies, is undoubtedly one of the most significant thinkers of recent Latin American philosophy of the subject. He bases his thought on a double criticism of the modern concept of subjectivity:<sup>6</sup>

- Dussel criticizes, on the one hand, the concept of subjectivity of the classical modern philosophy which has been developed along the lines of the thought of René Descartes, Immanuel Kant and philosophers of German idealism. The purely spiritual imagined subject of modern philosophy remains too abstract. It is considered in its finitude but not in its vulnerability and needs. In the context of this sort of thinking, the need for “liberation” is neither visible nor founded.
- On the other hand, this concept of subjectivity has been leading directly to the neo-liberal market-hypertrophía. The market as meta-system has become at the same time the meta-subject (that which dominates everything) or simply,

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5. Cf. P. Richard, “El grito del sujeto: un aporte radical de Franz J. Hinkelammert a la Teología de la Liberación,” in *Itinerários de la razón crítica. Homenaje a Franz Hinkelammert en sus 70 años*, eds. J. Duque and G. Gutierrez (San José, C.R.: DEI, 2001), 315-327, 321.

6. Cf. E. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión* (Madrid: Editorial Trotta, 1998), 515-521; cf. also A. Stickel, *Das «menschliche Subjekt». Die Methode ist für den Menschen da, und nicht der Mensch für die Methode. Grundriss eines Ansatzes von Franz-J. Hinkelammert*, Erlangen 2006 [dissertation in evangelical theology], 28-38.

*the* historical subject. Concrete individuals as powerless moments have barely a place within the total system. One should also note at this point that F. J. Hinkelammert criticizes Marxism in similar manner: its historical-materialistic concept of the subject – the “proletariat” – has also been reduced to functional terms.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast, a number of Latin American thinkers such as Dussel, Hinkelammert and others, define the subject phenomenologically as *vivo humano concreto*.<sup>8</sup> According to them, this approach, in contradistinction with the objectivistic approaches of economics, politics and the like should, however, not obscure the plurality and pluriformity of humankind, but should rather make the foundation of political ethics visible.

## 1. The “Epiphany” of the Other as Origin of Moral Experience

Following Heidegger’s being-in-the-world and the Levinas’ “epiphany of the other” in “face to face (*cara a cara*)” encounter, Dussel conceives of the subject as unfolding itself in being other to other(s). This unfolding of the subject precedes each I and first opens up his/her/their horizon as world. On this basis of interpersonal relations ethical answerability demonstrates itself through the other(s): to respect this otherness of the other(s), whose breaking into nearness precisely challenges my freedom towards an (ethical) standpoint.

Such encounters – which Dussel presents as archetypes in eroticism and festivity – are always of a temporary nature. But though Dussel understands those encounters as mediated, as for instance in the economic and political field, it is also essential to note that he understands these encounters from the fundamental personal angle.

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7. Cf. F. J. Hinkelammert, *Crítica de la razón utópica* 1984 (dt.: Kritik der utopischen Vernunft. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit den Hauptströmungen der modernen Gesellschaftstheorie, Mainz 1994).

8. E. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*, 519.

## 2. Being-subject as Relationality of Concrete People within Systemic Connections

**Economy:**<sup>9</sup> Since being-in-the-world is developed from physical, psychological and social needs, which can only be fulfilled intersubjectively, Dussel understands economy from the very start as ethical relation between concrete people. That means *eo ipso* a relation of mutual responsibility, which has a direct impact on structural needs. Therefore any personal direct relations do not exist as simply independent from the economic.

**Politics:**<sup>10</sup> Political action of the subject, his abilities and needs are also to be understood within the ordering of society. Following E. Levinas, Dussel introduces in this context the notion of the “collective face”, which becomes recognizable in particular in the marginalized, or in the archetypal image of the *indígenas*.

Politics and economy, each in its own way, take on tasks from the perspective of the needs and the interconnectedness of the subject. They always concretize these tasks, though, within institutional-structural frames, but since they should be concretized humanely, meaning, in pursuit of human justice, they cannot reduce the subjectivity of all participants to mere roles or functions.

Dussel tries to develop the roles and functions of economy and politics on the basis of a comprehensive anthropology in which the subject is thought of in terms of corporeality and intersubjectivity. Wherever this basis on the subject is absent, like it is in the case, for instance, of globalized neo-liberal capitalism, economy and politics will languish in mere functional ways of action which only follow their own systemic laws.

Using consciously a Pauline metaphor, F. J. Hinkelammert calls “the law” (*la ley*) functionalistic ethics that only brings death to the subject along with the functionalistic system that it establishes.<sup>11</sup> As

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9. H. Schelkshorn, *Ethik der Befreiung*, 90-92.

10. Cf. H. Schelkshorn, *Ethik der Befreiung*, 87-90.

11. Cf. F. J. Hinkelammert, *El sujeto y la ley. El retorno del sujeto reprimido* (Heredia, C.R.: Editorial Universidad Nacional, 2005).

opposed to such “law” – which is indeed a given in neoliberalism – Dussel emphasizes *ética funcional* the responsibility of the subject within the system:

The other is the potential and actual victim of my functional action within the system. I am responsible.<sup>12</sup>

Starting from the other – from his/her concrete historical-psychological needs – Dussel follows Levinas’ phenomenology in defining economic and political justice. But since he thinks through the structural economic and political action as well, he goes clearly beyond Levinas and concretizes Levinas’ “face” within the Latin American reality.

## II. THE CRY OF THE SUBJECT AND THE *INDIGNACIÓN ÉTICA*

Ethics of the subject takes its hermeneutical starting point where the subject is most obvious, namely where it is denied by the system and turned to its victim:

Human subjectivity – concrete, empirical and alive — reveals itself and appears as an appeal of last instance in the victim who is suppressed and excluded by the system: it is the subject that can live no longer and cries in pain.<sup>13</sup>

This cry, at first unarticulated, becomes concrete where a community interprets and articulates it. It is certainly no accident that Dussel, a Mexican, cites the case of the Zapatistas and thus, it is no accident for him either to take the historical instance of the Zapatista movement as the movement of the indigenous who for centuries have been treated as political, cultural and social non-subjects.

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12. “El otro es la víctima posible y causada por mi acción funcional en el sistema. Yo soy responsable.” E. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*, 524.

13. “En la víctima, dominada por el sistema o excluida, la subjetividad humana concreta, empírica, viviente, se revela, aparece como «interpelación» en última instancia: es el sujeto que ya no puede vivir y grita de dolor.” E. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*, 524.

Dussel sees the fundamental experience of the *marginalización* as reflection of human togetherness, that is most outspoken in their cry: “Never anymore a world without us!” (*¡Nunca más un mundo sin nosotros!*):

- in gender relations: the woman, ultimately the widow;
- in intergenerational relations: the child, ultimately the orphan;
- in political relations: the stranger, ultimately the enemy;
- in economic relations: the competitor and/or the victim of competition, ultimately the poor.

These biblical categories point paradigmatically to the marginalized and the excluded, that means, to those who are “others” as opposed to the dominant “we”. As “others” the marginalized (that means, the victims of dominating social action) become at the same time the “privileged point of reference” as well as the “primary subjects” of ethics. Because the victim as “negated subject” cannot even live, s/he poses precisely the primary demand for the others.

**Indignación ética.**<sup>14</sup> The term *indignación*, while primarily denoting indignation, reflects at the same time the cause of the indignation, namely the denigration of the other(s). *Indignación ética* is a response to the victim who gets a face in the cry. This is a phenomenological approach that concludes from physical to moral evil: it is *indignación* because of a *condición subhumana*, in which the human being is deprived of his/her status as subject:

Moral indignation, the recognition of the dignity of the victims and recognition of common vulnerability are in recent developments in liberation theology the fundamental sources of a renewed conception of the subject and are the conditions for any liberating and effective action.<sup>15</sup>

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14. For the notion *indignación ética*, cf. J. Mo Sung, *Sujeto y sociedades complejas: para repensar los horizontes utópicos* (San José, C.R.: DEI, 2005), 40-43; G. Gutiérrez, “Ideas para un programa alternativo en el ámbito de la ética,” *Pasos* No. 93 (2001): 27-40.

15. “Indignación ética, reconocimiento de la dignidad de las víctimas y reconocimiento de la com vulnerabilidad [...] son fuentes fundamentales de una concepción renovada de sujeto, que en la Teología de la Liberación se viene desarrollando recientemente, y que son a su vez condiciones de toda acción liberadora eficaz.” G. Gutiérrez, “Vulnerabilidad, corporalidad, sujeto y política popular,” *Pasos* No. 121 (2005): 1-12, 6.



Following Levinas, Latin American thinking of the subject emphasises the fundamental asymmetry of the intersubjective relation: it is the other who looks at me and who makes me responsible – the other(s) beyond his/her/their roles: social, economic, political etc. The epiphany of the other(s) in the concrete other turns into the experience of the gratuity/graciousness (*gratuidad*) of being – and the more so, where his/her/their dignity appears as no longer recognizable.

In an extreme case, if we encounter in our society, for example, a poor woman, a black woman, a lesbian, a prostitute, a woman with AIDS, a woman with physical disability, an ugly or old woman, and still we are able to see in her a human being with basic dignity, then we have truly come upon a spiritual experience of grace (an awareness of pure gratuity beyond all social conventions) and of faith (to see that which is invisible to the 'eyes of the world.').<sup>16</sup>

This experience of grace has also a dimension of what theology considers justifying grace: while success seeks to justify itself in our society as the “law” which measures everything and “justifies” everyone, *indignación* does not only acknowledge the demand, but also the *reality* of grace in those who according to the “law” have no value or dignity and who therefore are “abased”. To acknowledge this reality means, however, at the same time to justify oneself – it means, in theological terms, turning around (*metánoia*) from the *incurvatio in seipsum* towards being-for-the-other(s).<sup>17</sup>

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16. “En un caso extremo, si en nuestra sociedad encontramos, por ejemplo, una mujer pobre, negra, lesbiana, prostituta, con SIDA, deficiente física, fea y vieja, y aun así logramos ver en ella un ser humano con su dignidad fundamental, tenemos realmente una experiencia espiritual de la gracia (reconocimiento en la pura gratuidad, más allá de toda convención social) y de fe (ver lo que es invisible a los «ojos del mundo»)." J. Mo Sung, *Sujeto y sociedades complejas: para repensar los horizontes utópicos*, 44.

17. With regards to the relational understanding of sin as it is being assumed here, see G.M. Prüller-Jagenteufel, “Befreit zur Verantwortung. Sünde und Versöhnung in der Ethik Dietrich Bonhoeffers” (EThD 7), (Münster, 2004), 46-235.

The acknowledgement of the subject is not based on a neutral, mutual encounter but on the perception of the needs of the other, and therefore, on an asymmetrical relation: it is neither simply neutral nor necessarily partisan. Subjectivity does justice to the basic vulnerability of the other(s) by negating the negation of their subjectivity and by mediating this acknowledgment in a historical project. This is the necessary concretization of this *indignación ética*, which wants to be an option for life that is more than mere emotional expression of sympathy. The *ética del sujeto* is at the same time an *ética para la vida*, that is, an ethic that takes the side of those whose life is most obviously threatened.<sup>18</sup>

The three step *indignación–imaginación–transformación*, which we see here, is in correspondence with the classical seeing-judging-acting of liberation theology. *Indignación* corresponds with reality, *imaginación* with utopia – *una sociedad donde quepan todos y todas* – and *transformación* with historical action. It is precisely in this process that the subject is constituted as an ethical, and therefore a historical subject as well.

### III. THE NEW SUBJECT AS SOCIO-HISTORICAL ACTOR

New Latin American philosophy of subjectivity no longer takes to the consideration of collective “entities” such as “the people”, “class” or simply “the poor” as carriers of the historical process. Rather, it acknowledges the development of the new historical subjects (in plural), acting not so much on the basis of politics as on the civil-social basis of self organisation in the new social movements – the *movimientos sociales*. These new historical subjects are precisely those actors who start from concrete demands: the *sujeto vivo humano concreto* is the starting point and point of reference; the project is a *praxis para la vida*:

The affirmation of life is not a goal (or end in itself) but is a project: a project to preserve oneself as a subject, (a project) that can have certain goals.<sup>19</sup>

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18. G. Gutiérrez, “Ideas para un programa alternativo en el ámbito de la ética,” *Pasos* No. 93 (2001): 27-40.

19. “La afirmación de la vida no es un fin, sino un proyecto: el proyecto de conservarse como sujeto, que puede tener fines.” E. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*, 523.

The notion “project” is central: it does not appeal to a utopia that refers to an undetermined, far future; the project should prove itself concretely in the here and now, since it is about the life of concrete here-and-now living people. The starting point demonstrates also its strength over and against market liberalism. At best it is able to interpret the poverty of the present as a transitional phase towards a time when life will be better for everyone. Thus, Dussel poses the concrete reference to the present life, particularly its culture of death as fundamental moment of ethics – of an ethics that is able to take a critical stand against the *status quo*.

### 1. *Social Movements as Subjects of Liberating Praxis*

The victim immediately presents through his mere existence – namely, as a human being robbed of his subjectivity and threatened by death – the criticism of his form of existence. But since the historical, economic or social situation legitimizes his status of being victim, and as it makes the victim as victim invisible, the (self-) consciousness of the victim is initially rendered abstract and formal, that is, as non-consciousness. In order to understand oneself not only as suffering, but as victim – that is as victim of human beings – it is at least necessary to develop a critical self-consciousness on the basis of which the causes of the *victimación* become apparent: those causes do not lie in one’s own insufficiency, but in concrete relationships of power, whether they are interpersonal (i.e. relational) or structural (i.e. systemic). The self-consciousness (*auto-conciencia*) of the victim as victim – and the implicit protest against it – leads towards the development of a critical consciousness (*conciencia ética crítica*). The steps towards this development, though, are not possible on the individual level but only within the community. Thus, the ethical praxis can also only be possible, thanks to the (self-) organization of the victims.

The emergence of new subjects implies an ethical process of movement from a level of passive subjectivity to other levels of greater self-consciousness.<sup>20</sup>

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20. “El surgimiento de nuevos sujetos supone un proceso ético del pasaje de un grado de subjetividad pasiva a otros de mayor autoconciencia.” E. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*, 526.

Dussel, along with other thinkers, places the capability towards subjectivity within the *movimientos sociales* as concrete communities; they form “moments of a microstructure of power”<sup>21</sup> bringing people together. These communities, therefore, can become subjects of liberating praxis.

The “question of the subject” (in its intersubjective, socio-historical sense as emerging from diverse subjects of *new* social movements in the structures of Power), therefore, is precisely the problematique of the community of victims becoming ethical-critical.<sup>22</sup>

Where then does the strength of these new historical subjects become visible? François Houtart sees the new developing movements as arising from the coordination of various social groupings. He thus views them not only as carriers of values (like justice, equality, human rights) but also in particular as protagonists of protest and resistance (*protestas y luchas*).<sup>23</sup> It is this very action that leads to their coming together and their development as new historical subjects.

The *movimientos* are being built from below (*desde abajo*) through the transformation of concrete and limited actions that in turn go through a process of institutionalization. Two conditions should be met for these processes to become capable of forming a critical counter-subject against the globalizing powers of capital:

- On the one hand, there should be the capability of internal criticism, so that the focus remains on concrete goals and that there will be enough flexibility for the needed changes and shifts;
- On the other hand, there should also be the capability to grasp the demands of globalization and to contextualize

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21. E. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*, 525.

22. “La ‘cuestión del sujeto’ (en su sentido inter-subjetivo, socio-histórico, como emergencia de los diversos sujetos de *nuevos* movimientos sociales en los diagramas del Poder), entonces, es exactamente la problemática del devenir ético-crítico de la comunidad de víctimas.” E. Dussel, *Ética de la liberación en la edad de la globalización y de la exclusión*, 527.

23. F. Houtart, “Los movimientos sociales y la construcción de un nuevo sujeto histórico,” *Pasos* No. 125 (2006): 10-15, 10.

them concretely: the concrete victims of the system should always remain focused on actions that must be taken accordingly.

Taking the cue from Antonio Gramsci, the *movimientos* should have a concrete but limited role. They are not the whole movement. But as they work towards analysis and orientation to the whole, they take upon themselves a selectively practical exemplary role of nevertheless presenting themselves as an essential part of the whole. They not only develop themselves as catalysts and points of crystalization. They also develop others to become new political and historical subjects, albeit with limited capabilities.

F. Houtart develops the steps towards becoming subjects, as follows:

1. The first condition is to develop a collective consciousness that is based on an analysis of reality and on ethics.<sup>24</sup> The *a priori* option for the poor is immediately necessary on this level because this option does not simply follow from the analysis, but is at once the starting point. While this option for the poor is an hermeneutical *a priori*, its translation into concrete projects nevertheless follows *a posteriori*.

2. The second step is the development of an ethics that is built on notions of human rights and the common good, understood as *la bien de todos*.<sup>25</sup> The basis of human rights should not only not remain abstract in this interplay but it should become the key notion for people's lives in the concrete.

3. The third step is strategic action:

- The utopian level, not as an illusory regulative idea but as a necessary goal of a society that is desirable for all;
- The second and third levels are the middle and short term goals of political action necessary to realize this (utopian) goal as soon as possible.<sup>26</sup>

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24. "La primera condición es elaborar una conciencia colectiva basada sobre un análisis de la realidad y una ética." F. Houtart, "Los movimientos sociales y la construcción de un nuevo sujeto histórico," *Pasos* No. 125 (2006): 10-15, 13.

25. *Ibid.*, 14.

26. *Ibid.*

The strength of the *movimientos sociales* is exactly this: they contribute to the formation of a collective consciousness as well as to the formation of a corresponding ethics through concrete political action and the experience of partial successes. Equally important as these steps in the process of concretely translating political goals is the process whereby all participants become real subjects.

## ***2. The Gender Perspective: Women Becoming Subjects***

In Latin America, *mestizaje*, poverty and femininity constitute conditions of marginality and, on account of their various *dangerous qualities*, are kept in check by intervening barriers that can block their subversive potentials.<sup>27</sup>

It is certainly not surprising that an option for the poor, if understood as an option for the marginalized, is always to be concretized as an option for women. This option is in no way secondary, as it is in a patriarchal system that in the Latin American context manifests itself in a most pronounced way in machismo. This is particularly what Veerle Draulans has validated in her paper *Female Corporality as Object of Exploitation*. This sort of exploitation often takes place in situations of military conflict but the intertextuality of *gender*, *race* and *class* can clearly be observed in Latin American societies.

Women in Latin American societies are defined by the heteronomic role image of machismo which, as Roxana Hidalgo here explains, is primarily focused on sexuality:

Women remain... reduced to being bodily subjugated, whether as wives or mothers, as nuns or spinsters or as prostitutes, brutally being denied access to free exercise of their sexuality, initiative and autonomy as subjects.<sup>28</sup>

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27. "En América Latina, *el mestizaje, la pobreza y la feminidad* constituyen condiciones de marginalidad, que por sus múltiples *cualidades peligrosas* deben ser controladas mediante barreras que puedan bloquear su potencialidad subversiva." R. Hidalgo Xirinachs, "La otredad en América Latina: etnicidad, pobreza y feminidad," *Pasos* No. 113 (2004): 1-11, 10.

28. "Las mujeres quedan [...] reducidas a la sujeción corporal, ya sea como esposas y madres, como monjas o soteronas, o como prostitutas, negándoles brutalmente el acceso al ejercicio libre de la sexualidad, la agresividad y la autonomía como sujetos." R. Hidalgo Xirinachs, "Sobre las relaciones entre género, subjetividad y ley a comienzos de siglo XXI," *Pasos* No. 119 (2005): 14-22, 15.

The ambiguity of this image is reflective of the male self-image. The honor of the *pater familias* appears constantly threatened by his wife or his daughter respectively. This threat in turn autonomously defines women's sexuality and thus they are viewed to take on the role of "whore" or "femme fatale". Categories like "defense of honor" and the "fear of shame" – both qualifications reflective of the loss of the father's or husband's control over women – are therefore particular characteristics of Latin American machismo.

That the subjectivity of women is reduced in this structure is obvious. Women not only in such kind of society belong to the poor but are rendered still poorer by being denied public expression of their being women. Thus, the oppression that they experience stems from violence both physical and symbolic.

Advocacy, or even the substitute cry, is a beginning. It can lead those to whom their subjectivity has been denied to find it. This is the reason how, for instance, a writer like Clarice Lispector construes her engagement with women of Latin America:

What I write is more than an invention (or fiction), it is my obligation to speak about this woman among thousands of women. Even if it is merely a small work of art, it behooves me to reveal her life. Because she has the right to cry out loud. Therefore, I cry out loud.<sup>29</sup>

After the cry women take the word. Therefore it is no accident either that space for becoming subject is found in the new formed *movimientos*. Here women play a prominent role and these movements are clearly the business of women. A lot more can be said, therefore, of these movements than what can be said of classical liberation theology where the gender perspective had remained underexposed as secondary contradiction.

This becomes even clearer, when one takes into account that solidarity with the marginalized is inseparable from the feminine: it is the primary definition-chiffre for the others. It is always feminine

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29. "Lo que escribo es más que una invención, es obligación mía hablar de esa muchacha, de entre millares de ellas. Es mi deber, aunque sea un arte menor, revelar su vida. Porque tiene derecho al grito. Entonces yo grito." C. Lispector, *La hora de la estrella* (Madrid: Editorial Siruela, 1977), 15.

connotations like need, passion, desire, lacking rationality and so on, that are ascribed not only to women, but also to the *indígenas*, rebellious *campesinos* and all forms of resistance of oppressed peoples. At best these connotations are considered romantic, though unrealistic. At worst, they serve to reinforce the stereotypical image of the woman as representative of chthonic powers of chaos while they at the same time deny her public expression of her being woman and provide the penultimate step to demonizing every resistance and any alternative praxis. In any case, patriarchal systems of power try to bring such “dangerous herds” under their control. When one holds to the vision that the goal of the *movimientos* is a society “where there is place for all”, it is obvious that the ethics of the subject aims at changing consciousness – from the logic of the dichotomy of irreconcilable differences in class antagonism towards a logic of diversity in which those who are marginalized particularly secure place that embodies the paradigm of otherness. The non-substantialistic notion of the subject that is being developed in Latin American liberation philosophy and theology, which understands the subject as “project”, should therefore also serve to prepare the way to such a culture of diversity, without in any way weakening the demand for justice.

#### **IV. WHAT DOES THIS (NEW) CONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE OPTION FOR THE POOR OFFER?**

As opposed to the concept of classical liberation theology, the (new) concept of “option for the poor” as “ethics of the subject” which has been presented here briefly demonstrates some essential further developments. It is, for instance, noted here more clearly than it was noted before that there is a danger that partisanship for the poor could degenerate into an inflexible loyalty to particular groups. Consequently, such partisanship could engender such tenacious thinking without misunderstanding to the point that option for the poor would precisely no longer apply to concrete subjects in general, but only to subjects that are considered under the formal rubrics of “poor, oppressed and marginalized.” Starting point is therefore neither a Marxist analysis in class categories, but rather the concrete experience



of marginalization by concrete people. The “revolutionary” project of the *movimientos sociales* is therefore aimed less at taking over state power as it is a civil social project: “A society in which there is place for all and which lives in harmony with nature”.<sup>30</sup>

The interconnectedness of partisanship and universality is realized in the process of promoting practical solidarity towards a whole. Though the process is loaded with tension, partisanship in favor of the marginalized, nevertheless, provides a guiding utopia, i.e. the participation of all. There is no levelling of otherness and difference as there is no restoration of the structures of domination and exploitation in the process of laying down the new foundation of society. It is an utopia diametrically opposed to lived reality:

The world continues to be organized in opposite poles, which exclude and negate one another; the identity of the dominant pole is placed above the heads of those socially and historically excluded, persecuted and considered as inferior. The violent persecution, denigration and relentless destruction of the *other* are legitimized.<sup>31</sup>

Starting from the need for interconnectedness among subjects – positing intersubjectivity while respecting distinctions and differences – it is possible to keep in view both differences and universal claims of justice, human dignity and human rights and to demand and promote these claims, even more so, through active partisan engagement.

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30. “Una sociedad donde quepan todos y todas y que esté en armonía con la naturaleza.” P. Richard, “El grito del sujeto: un aporte radical de Franz J. Hinkelammert a la teología de la liberación,” in *Itinerarios de la razón crítica. Homenaje a Franz Hinkelammert en sus 70 años*, eds. J. Duque and G. Gutiérrez (San José (C.R.): DEI 2001), 315-327, 327.

31. “El mundo sigue organizado en polos opuestos que se excluyen y niegan el uno al otro, la identidad del polo dominante se instaura por encima de lo excluido, perseguido y devaluado social e históricamente. Se legitima la persecución violenta, da denigración y la destrucción implacable del otro.” R. Hidalgo Xirinachs, “La otredad en América Latina: etnicidad, pobreza y feminidad,” *Pasos* No. 113 (2004): 1-11, 6.

“Ethics of the subject” is therefore the basis of an “ethics of resistance” against the ideological weapons of death.<sup>32</sup> The marginalized come out from the invisibility in which neoliberal privatization discourse tries to hide them by obscuring the political dimension of marginalization. The first effective resistance will become possible on this level. It will at the same time be a demand to become subject by those who in the context of the globalizing economy are simply considered non-subjects.

In order not to lose the perspective of *desde abajo* and *desde los márgenes* what must remain in focus is the concrete action of resistance of the new historical subjects. This can be the critical corrective from the outside as well as a necessary “intellectual” (self) criticism. It is therefore the primary task of the *ética del sujeto* to remain sensitive to the continuous impulse and critical stance of these developing *movimientos*. Furthermore, it can no longer remain a neglected contribution to the ethical discourse in Europe.

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32. F. J. Hinkelammert, *Las armas ideológicas de la muerte* (San José (C.R.): DEI, 1981) (dt.: Die ideologischen Waffen des Todes. Zur Metaphysik des Kapitalismus, Münster 1985).