

CORRUPTION AND NEO-COLONIALISM IN LATIN AMERICA

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Abstract

Corruption is deemed one of the main drivers of development challenges in many countries, mainly in those territories that drag the shackles of colonialism. The roots of corruption in underdeveloped countries can be traced from Colonial times from South America, Asia to Africa the pattern seems to be repeated: populations subjugated to new masters, disenfranchised indigenous people, labour and sexual exploitation, brutal punishments for those who resisted colonial power were commune features for countries that experienced colonialism. Many of those power excesses have been recognised historically, however one of the most persistent element of Colonialism that survives until nowadays is corruption. The present text aims to shine a light on the relation of colonialism and corruption in Latin America. The hypothesis raised suggests that corruption was installed through colonialism in the Latin America region. The text is presented in three parts; the first one offers some historical considerations about European colonialism, the second one describes the strategies used by colonisers and the use of corruption as a tool to impose their rule and consolidate their power, and the third one exposes the new colonial form of corruption carried out by the West, led today by the United States.

Keywords: colonialism, corruption, Latin America, rule of law.

Introduction

Many countries in Latin America were colonised by European rule between the 15th and 16th century. They shared many historical features: An historical past permeated by genocide, exploitation, human suffering, slavery and colonialism¹. Certainly, there are regional, geographical, cultural and social differences, but their past has resonances in the present. Today, many ex-colonies are countries considered as undeveloped countries². There are many criteria used to describe the under developing of these

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¹ Colonialism is defined for the purpose of this text as “the conquest and control of other people’s land and goods (...) and as the takeover of territory, appropriation of material resources, exploitation of labour and interference with political and cultural structures of another territory or nation.” (Loomba 2015, 20-27).

² The term of underdeveloped country is an unofficial term to describe a country with widespread chronic poverty, corruption and less economic development in comparison to developed countries. Underdeveloped countries are also named low- income countries or least-developed countries. The most common method to

countries, however the most common consideration is the lack of rule of law³ and the rampant corruption. In this context, the present text aims to analyse the intertwined relation between corruption and colonialism. The study of colonial corruption in Latin America can help us to disentangle the argument of civilising narratives and questioning the legitimacy of colonial rule. The objective of this work is to study corruption as a tool that eased colonialism in Latin America. The hypothesis is based on the assumption that corruption was established under colonialism in the region. The text is presented in three parts the first one exposes some historical reviews regarding colonialism and its relation with corruption. The second one describes some methods used by colonisers to consolidate colonialism in Latin America among the most important was corruption. The third one offers some examples of new colonialism, where corruption continues being used as part of tools of control by the West, mainly the United States. Finally, some conclusions about the most important ideas of corruption and colonialism in Latin America.

A brief historical review

The arrival of Christopher Columbus and Amerigo Vespuccio in the 15th and 16th Centuries ushered in the discovery of the New World in Latin America. The names of Hernán Cortés and Francisco Pizarro are common in the history of the conquerors in the region. The Spanish colonisation in Latin America began in 1493 on the island of Hispaniola, in the Caribbean, through the exploration of Christopher Columbus. Later on, Hernán Cortés landed also in Hispaniola, nowadays Santo Domingo, from where he reached Mexico in 1519 and defeated the Aztec Empire in 1521, ushering in the colonisation of many countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. While, in Perú Francisco Pizarro toppled the Inca Empire in 1532. In Brazil, Pedro Alvares Cabral landed in 1500 with a crew of 1,200 Portuguese, subjugating immediately the native people. These conquests set up the foundation of colonial regimes that transformed the continent.

The colonisation of indigenous people in the region has had many political, social, ethnical, economic and cultural consequences that continue resonating until today. The social class division established between “colonisers” and “colonised” people were

categorise the development of a country is the United Nations' Human Development Index (HDI) that evaluates each country's human development by measuring indicators such as life expectancy, education and income per capital, considering Human Development Index (HDI), the countries are ranked from 0 to 1, where 0 is the less developed and 1 is the most developed. There are four categories: low human development (0-.55), medium human development (.55-.70), high human development (.70-80), and very high human development (.80-1.0). The Human Development Index (HDI) is a summary measure of average achievement in key dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, being knowledgeable and having a decent standard of living (UNDP 2023).

³ Following to the definition of the United Nations (UN), the concept of “Rule of law” is defined as “a principle of governance in which all persons, institutions and entities, public and private, including the State itself, are accountable to laws that are promulgated publicly. The laws are applied equally to everybody and they are applied independently. Besides, the laws are adopted in order to ensure the respect of the principles of supremacy of law, equality before law, accountability to law, fairness in the application of law, separation of powers, participation in the adoption of decisions, legality, avoidance of arbitrariness, and transparency legal and procedural.” (UN 2004).

reflected in the caste system⁴, classifying people according to their ethnic and biological background.

According to Eakin, the peninsular – a person born in Europe, whose parents were both European – was at the top of the social and economic hierarchy; the second group was the Creole – a person of mixed race, from European and indigenous background –, the creoles were also known as *Mestizos* or *criollos*; the third group were the indigenous people or Indians – both parents indigenous (Eakin 2007)

The descendants of the conquistadors, along with new arrivals from Spain and the *Mestizos* formed a new elite class in the country. The Spaniards and *mestizos*, assumed the idea of superiority based on their biological and cultural roots, who reached the highest positions of power and prestige, unlike the indigenous people, who accepted the assumption of “inferiority”. In this sense, social class was defined based on biological and ethnic features.

The high positions in the administration of new colonies and the concentration of wealth were also associated with ethnic background, therefore Europeans and *mestizos* occupied the better jobs, while marginal and overexploited jobs were given to the indigenous people such as agriculture or mining, while women were used mainly as domestic or sexual slaves.

According to Alan Knight, the difference between the indigenous people and the Spanish people was that the Spaniards were racially identified with power and privilege, cultural and biological superiority, in which Europeans and *mestizos* enjoyed better access to power and property (Knight 1990).

Ferguson argues that since the arrival of Spanish conquerors in Latin America, land, wealth, and political representation have been controlled by a tiny elite, who had the right to exploit indigenous people. The land distribution and property rights played out a key role in the economic structure of colonialism. Under the *encomienda* system⁵, the Spanish elite gained the right to exploit labour for the Crown; in the *haciendas* – large landholdings allocated for plantations, mines, and factories –, the *hacendados* or *patrones* acquired the right to own land and control labour. The *hacendados* were the owners of the land, and the indigenous people worked as *peones* – farmer workers – on the land belonged to the *patrón*-owner (Ferguson 2011).

The *Encomiendas* were not granted by the Spanish crown in perpetuity to a man and his heirs, since the property belonged to the Spanish central colonial power, by Castilian law. However, slowly they evolved into hereditary properties through *haciendas*. The ultimate result was that the conquistador class became the idle rich of America (Ferguson 2011, 113), controlling not only the economic wealth, land property, but also the political structure.

Colonialism in Latin America not only brought a new social division, economic inequality, brutal labour division, cultural and religious differences, since the

⁴ Caste system is used as a social system that combines some elements of ethnic background, hereditary occupation, social class, religious hierarchy and social identity, and it is defined at birth (Young 2003).

⁵ The *encomienda* –trustee- is a labour system that was employed mainly by the Spanish Crown during the colonial rule, in which leaders of the indigenous communities paid a tribute to masters or colonisers in the form of food, cloth, minerals such as gold or silver or providing work force as required by the masters (Angeles and Neandis 2015).

Europeans also assumed a superiority given by Catholicism and pure blood⁶, while the indigenous were considered as “savages” and “ignorant”, but also Colonialism imposed a new political administration and government structure.

The colonial government based on the *encomienda* system, implemented by Spanish colonizers in Latin America was the milestone not only to rule the new territories, but also the keystone to give birth to corruption, providing extra-privileges and money to the masters.

The Crown granted a number of indigenous people to a Spanish colonizer in order to instruct them in the Spanish language and Catholicism. The coloniser received in return a tribute in the form of labour, gold, animals, and agricultural products from indigenous people. This system resulted in serious administrative abuses that led to not only the inhuman treatment of indigenous workers, but also to embezzlement of resources by the local elite (Keen and Haynes 2008).

The legacy of colonial rule and its influence on local elites was paramount to consolidate colonialism in Latin America and Africa. Since the beginning of the colonialism, corruption was embodied in the administrative structure. The colonisers considered fair to use the administrative structure for their advantage, since they had put their lives in risk going to the new world. Therefore, it was the “natural right” to rule and to exploit that position for their advantage. The same mentality was transmitted to the *encomenderos*–administrators used by the colonisers, who were usually indigenous elites-, since “Columbus instituted a law of tribute which meant that if a native did not meet their quota of collecting gold, they would have limbs chopped off. The brutal conditions in which the indigenous people were forced to work, made them to succumb” (Andrews 2022, 29), in this way, the “*encomenderos*” readdressed their loyalty towards their master as form of survival, rather than serving to their communities, considering this premise, the colonialism in Latin America and Caribbean was more a genocide than a simple power subjugation over native people.

Pre-Columbian Mexico had a population that ranged between 25 and 30 million indigenous people. A similar population existed in the Andean region. Central America and the Antilles had between 10 and 13 million inhabitants. The indigenous people of the Americas numbered no less than 70 million or perhaps more, when the foreign conquerors appeared, in a century and a half, the indigenous people had been reduced to only 3 and a half million in the whole continent (Galeano 1971, 45)

According to Andrews “when Columbus arrived to the Americas, he found millions of people living in complex societies. The genocide in the Americas was without precedent, wiping up 99% of the natives. For example, just in the Caribbean, the Taino indigenous groups passed from the first contact with Columbus in 1492 until 1509 from 8 million to just 100,000 and by 1542 there were only 200 left. The scale of death has no parallel in human history. Certainly illness and viruses were part of the killers of native people, but the genocide inflicted by Europeans was without parallel” (Andrews 2022, 28)

⁶ The idea of “*Limpieza de sangre*” –pure blood- was created to protect the old Christians faith. The Spaniards used the concept of “purity of blood” in the New World to explain their political and economic domination over indigenous people and justify their position of bringing indigenous people into the church’s fold to save their souls (Martínez 2008).

Other authors such as Ali, Fjeldstad and Shifa (2021) consider that colonial power could impose its rule through violence and corruption through local elites. These authors studied colonialism in Africa, but their findings are more prominent in Latin America, since the chiefs considered as custodians of native land shifted their loyalty from their communities to their colonial masters, and in this scenario the colonial control happened through chiefs, rather than the formal legal systems introduced by colonial powers that depended of the central State of the mother land (Ali et al. 2021). This new strategy of control through the local chiefs was based on corruption, in which the chiefs were not accountable by the central colonial state, but rather by their masters. This logic also undermined the pre-colonial rules in which the chiefs were accountable by their communities and other members of the pre-colonial rulers such priests, “*chamanes*” –wise men- military leaders, and members of the supreme council (Portilla 2007).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the structure of the judicial apparatus of the Colony had three levels. Local legal authority was in the hands of a minor judicial official called Corregidor. The Royal Court was the highest court, and it was in charge of receiving appeals from local courts. Additionally, for the most important cases it was possible to appeal the decisions through the Royal Court before reaching the Council of the Indies, a special court located in Spain that had jurisdiction over the entire empire. The most important institution of the colonial legal system was the *Audiencia*, a court appointed by the King and based in the New Spain, which had simultaneously administrative and judicial responsibilities. This institutional arrangement was widely criticized, because it did not have a formal separation of legislative, executive, judicial and fiscal functions, which left a wide gap for abuses of power (Luis Eduardo 2002, 25). “The colonial service was endowed with broad discretionary powers, and worked closely with local interests to strengthen the status quo, manipulating colonial legal codes in favour of whoever paid for the services. Thus, the administrative positions were a source of rents. In this context, colonial elites in Latin America and Caribbean seized positions in the colony’s judicial bureaucracy as a way to capture rents -financial profits- and prestige. During the viceroyalty - colonial government-, occupy a position in the judicial system was a lucrative business for the ruling classes. In the 17th century, the most prominent men sought to take a position in the colonial administration as an opportunity to create fortunes for themselves, members of their extended families, friends and their clientele. Then, the colonial bureaucracy became a main source of income and social position for the Spanish aristocracy.” (Luis Eduardo 2002, 25).

The Royal Court of the New Spain was the scene of scandals related to nepotism and corruption among the *Oidores* - magistrates - who used to marry or become related to local families to multiply assets. For example, according to historical records, in 1792 a colonial official wrote to the Council of the Indies about the mismanagement of the *Oidores* José Martínez Malo and José Quintana, who not only occupied public positions, but also they become business partners of some miners of Chocó in Colombia (Luis Eduardo 2002, 25).

Another example of earlier forms of corruption dated from the report of the Viceroy of Peru, Manuel Guirior (1708-1788) in 1776 who assured that the administration of

justice in the Viceroyalty, that depended largely on governors and magistrates, had accepted payments for their food from illicit sources, due to the lack of payment or salary for their services (Luis Eduardo 2002, 25).

In the same line, Enrique Semo (2000), asserts that the colonial period (around 1521-1821) entrenched corruption into the public institutions, as the colonial administration resorted to selling public offices in the New Spain, from the lowest to the highest public positions: The practice of selling public offices was common in the Colonial times. Selling only lower positions of the government did not represent too much risk, but due to the lack of money in the Spanish government and the voracious appetite for money, the Crown began in 1633 to sell treasury functions, court hearings, as well as the posts of magistrates and mayors. There are even reports that on an occasion the post of Viceroy in the New Spain was sold (...) the public positions became private investments and the beneficiary had the right to exploit that investment as a form of wealth, influence peddling and power (Semo 2000, 70).

Nevertheless, authorities in Madrid, often turned a deaf ear to reports about corruption in its colonies and considered that corruption was a minor price to be paid in comparison to the benefit received, and it was a price to pay in order to maintain the Spanish empire (Dalmau 2021).

Certainly, becoming a public servant in the nineteenth-century Spanish empire was a risky adventure. To begin with, there was the long journey to the destination, and the cost of that adventure was covered by the same public servants to be (the state only reimbursed the amount afterwards). Travel expenses included train and boat tickets, accommodation, as well as leaving a maintenance allowance for family members who remained in Spain. The majority of candidates, most of who were of humble origins, could not afford all these expenses and were forced to request a loan, which carried high rates of interest at that time. As a result, by the time the employer took up his role, he had to devote a considerable part of his new salary to pay all of the incurred costs—with the added problem that salaries were rather modest and were often paid with a delay of two, three or even four months (Dalmau 2021, 245-246).

Public servants in the Spanish Empire could not rely on a long-term job. The reason for this is that “the Spanish political system worked according to a spoils system, by which every change in government was followed by a change in the public administration. This had to do with the patron–client networks” (Dalmau, 2021, 246) Following to Dalmau, it has been estimated that in each election during the Spanish Empire, between 1,000 and 5,000 public positions changed in order to make room for the new government’s client base (Dalmau 2021, 246).

Corruption in the Spanish Empire was fed by clientelism that was a prevalent form of political recruitment in Spain; the volatile character of the Spanish administration, and the voracity of colonial officers to amass large amount of wealth in short time, before being removed or displaced by the new administration.

The corruption of the empire was not limited only to the public servants in the colonies, but also in the whole Spanish government. “Irregularities in the customs office alone amounted to losses in state direct contributions of four million pesos a year, to the point that the customs office was regarded as the main black hole in the Spanish administration.” (Dalmau 2021, 246). Bribes, extortion, favouritism and

misappropriation were common practices in public Spanish institutions at all levels: tax authorities, public servants in infrastructure, hygiene, agriculture and trade among the most important.

Corruption as tool to rule

The study of corruption⁷ in Latin America implies to understand this phenomenon from different axes from the history to the roles that has played in different periods of time, as well as the perception of this phenomenon among the members of society⁸.

Mulinge and Lesetedi (1998) point out that colonisers used corruption as a tool to subdue and control over colonised people mainly through the practice of divide and rule communities, violence and allowing local tax collectors or “*encomenderos*” to abuse the colonial system to amass private wealth to their advantage.

Enrique Semo (2000) believes that corruption was exported by the Spanish colonisers, and gradually was expanded from the public institutions of the new colonies, political elite, and religious representatives to the rest of society, until it became a systemic form of transgression of the rule of law in the State nations in Latin America.

Guillermo Marín, whose studies focused in Mexico but his contribution can be serve to understand the corruption in Latin America, considers that corruption was a strategy of cultural resistance, a product of the clash between the two types of “Mexicos”: the “*Mexico profundo* –Mexico deep-” and the “*Mexico imaginario* – Mexico imaginary-”. The former emanated from the indigenous people and pre-colonial societies, who had a traditional vision of the world, and the latter was formed by *mestizos*, people with Spanish and indigenous descendants, who yearned to have the same European model of civilization in the new territories (Marín 2001; Leon-Portilla 2007).

In the same vein, Luis Eduardo asserts that the clash between the two visions from indigenous people and colonisers has had important consequences in the respect to the rule of law emanated from their Nation States through their public institutions and governments. One of the most popular phrases, reflecting this clash of perception is: “*Obedezco pero no cumpro*” – I obey but will not comply –. For the colonial elites, the

⁷ The term corruption is taken as the abuse of public power for private purposes. This definition assumes the distinction between public and private roles. In many societies the frontier between both spheres is not very clear, and it seems to be natural to give some gifts in exchange of assigning contracts and jobs. The distinction between public and private spheres seems to be strange and not clearly defined (Rose-Ackerman 1999, 91). The most common forms of political corruption are embezzlement, bribery, collusion, influence peddling, fraud, nepotism, cronyism, and clientelism.

⁸ It is important to mention that the concept of corruption has evolved historically. It has been used as a deviation or decomposition of a healthy nature of an object or subject. In the middle age (about 14th and 15th century), corruption was associated to the sins of the representatives of the Catholic Church, the lack of compliance with their role for caring poor people and the disproportionate exercise of the king’s powers. This period is associated between the fall of the Rome and the beginning of the Renaissance in the 14th century (Szeghyová 2011). During the 15th and 16th, there was the period of discoveries of the new world and the colonialism led by the Spanish, Portuguese, French and later on by the English colonialism in 17th, 18th and 19th centuries, without forgetting other colonial powers such as Germany, Holland, Portugal and Russia that perceived corruption a tool to maintain the empires (Burbank and Cooper 2011).

law became a norm that was an honour to break it. For the poor indigenous people, the law was arbitrary and strange, and therefore, had no moral force to respect it (Luis Eduardo 2002, 25).

Andrea Revueltas (1995) also points out that the lack of adherence to the law in Latin America, particularly in Mexico, is the result of contradictions of two projects: modernity and tradition: “we must not forget that behind the modern image of the Mexico civilised, it was an asymmetrical relationship of domination and subordination, which was imposed to the traditional societies”. Therefore, there was a conflict between two value systems and behaviours: the traditional and the modern based on the Western modernity (Revueltas 1995, 253).

Following to Revueltas, the modernity, embodied in the nation State and represented through administrative organisation and the respect of rule of law, was not expanded in a homogenous way, since the metropolis or mother land was modernised faster than the colonies. As a result of this, indigenous people felt alienated in the construction of colonial institutions and later alienated from the nation State and its institutions emerging from the colonial independence process (Revueltas 1992).

The independence of colonial Spanish and Portuguese powers in many Latin American countries happened between 1808 and 1826 did not eradicate corruption among urban elites formed mainly by *mestizos* groups, local indigenous elites led by caciques –strong local men-, and indigenous people who were also socialised under corruptive schemes. All social groups were socialised under corruption schemes, Christianity, violence, exclusion and natural acceptance of the superiority of *mestizos* and colonial descendants (Nieto 2023; Nieto 2011).

The colonialism also was the pillar for the development of capitalism in the world and the creation of wealth among the west elites, which was accompanied with the corruption. According to Loomba, the brutal gap between wealthier elites and over exploited indigenous labour force, contributed to the creation of economic differences and social class divisions giving birth to the capitalism in Latin America. Colonialism was the means through which capitalism achieved its global expansion (Loomba, 2015). Racism and corruption simply facilitated this process.

Kehinde Andrews in the same line considers that social class divisions prevalent today in colonised countries have also their roots in the colonial structure imposed by Europeans: “Industrial labour in the West was only possible because of the wealth generated from colonial exploitation. Without genocide, slavery and colonialism there is neither the wealth nor the resources for the revolutionary proletarian toiling in the European factory to come into existence.” (Andrews 2022).

In the same vein, Galeano (1971, 44) affirms that the Latin American colonial economy had the greatest concentration of free labor. The Spanish and Portuguese crown received one fifth of the value of the metals collected by the subjects of the New World, in addition to other taxes, which made possible the greatest concentration of wealth that any civilization has ever had in world history, which it served to create the capital in Europe, stimulated ‘the spirit of enterprise’ and financed the establishment of manufactures that gave a great boost to the industrial revolution, although for Latin America it meant historical impoverishment (Galeano 1971, 35-45).

Andrews affirms also that erasing the natives was a necessary foundation to build the development of the West. “The Americas provided the territory necessary for the production that fuelled the development of the industry of sugar, cotton, coffee, cacao among some. Then Colonialisation of the region was a precondition for slavery. Once the natives were made extinct the transatlantic slave trade began to provide the labour that built the modern world (...) the entire Western economic system depended on the wealth from slavery. We think that slavery belongs to the distant past, but the world we live in remains created in its image.” (Andrews 2022, 35, 59).

Thus, colonialism was not only the base of building capitalism, class division, and creation of wealth in the West, but also the fundament of human exploitation, ransacking, appropriation of territories and natural resources such as gold, silver, cacao, sugar and so on, as well as the seed for corruption in Latin America, since corruption was a tool used by colonisers to impose, control, exploit and rule the region.

Corruption in the post colonial Latin American countries

In recent years have appeared a few studies regarding the history of corruption in Europe. These studies have exposed that corruption has existed since the foundation of the Nations-States⁹ in Europe and “it has played an important role in the history of modern politics and state-building process” (Kroeze et al. 2021, 2) not only in Europe, but also in its colonies.

According to Kroeze et al., (2021) the history of corruption in Europe highlights the complexity of corruption in the modern era not only for Europe, but also for their colonies in Latin America, for example, corruption practices continued to exist even though “modern” elites proclaimed they had freed their regimes from this phenomenon. Moreover, in the late eighteen and nineteenth centuries, accusations and debates about corruption served to initiate reforms or, simply, as a pretext to undermine old structures and representatives of the so-called “Ancient Regimen” on overseas. Therefore, anticorruption campaigns have been used as a political weapon to get rid of opponents and to promote politicised institutional reforms in Europe and on abroad (Kroeze et al. 2021, 2).

European colonial elites in the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries have used the idea that corruption was a problem of traditional regimes to justify colonial rule (Kroeze et al. 2021, 3). Latin America countries since their independence process until nowadays, they have been considered as “traditional societies” with high levels of corruption due to their traditional social structures where nepotism, clientelism and cronyism are part of these societies. The Latin American region has also been

⁹ For the purpose of this text, Nation-State is used to defined a political unite, where the state is ruled by the principle of State sovereignty that recognised the right of the States to govern their territories, without external interference, and the principle of national sovereignty that recognises the right of citizens to govern themselves and share a cultural entity. The nation state implies that a state and a nation coincide. The modern nation-state is relatively new to human history emerging after the Renaissance and Reformation, associated with the efficient application of the law through the bureaucratic machinery of the State. As some modern nation-states prospered in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, they were promoted as a model form of governance (Anderson 2006).

characterised by inefficient bureaucracy¹⁰, and the lack of modernity to adopt “anti-corruption reforms”.

However, the studies of corruption show that all countries suffer from the cancer of corruption. Certainly, the intensity, frequency and ferocity are different on developed countries than countries with colonial background, particularly those in Latin America and Africa. Corruption has been present in the history of empires and the construction of Nation-State in Europe, as well as in the rest of the world from the Egyptian to the Roman Empire and from the East to the West. The differences have been that the perceptions on the corruption have changed. In “traditional societies”, nepotism, favouritism, influence peddling, cronyism were embedded in the social structures (Buchan and Hill 2014). Therefore, we need to change the analysis perspective, in which corruption is a specific problem from the “South” or from the underdeveloped world, since colonialism promoted this view as a way to impose superiority over “poor countries”.

Andrews considers that the independence of the colonies is relative, because when the European powers departed, they left behind local elites who took the place of colonial administrators, but with power limited. Local elites needed to follow the rules laid down by the departing colonial powers, otherwise they would be deposed. “Leaders who opposed to the West interest, they are removed from office on the grounds of authoritarianism or corruption.” (Andrews 2022).

Andrews exposes the logic of Western imperialism from its formation until the New Age of the Empire¹¹, in which United States is at the heart of this empire after the Second War World. According to Andrews, the framework established by the new age of empire is clear: Leaders who comply with the prevailing order are supported and lavished with money to keep them in power and build staggering personal wealth, through allow them or close the eyes when they exercise corruption or any other crime against citizens (Andrews 2022). There are numerous examples in Latin America that confirm this theory.

¹⁰ According to Max Weber, bureaucracy is an organisation highly structured with impersonal, rational and hierarchical rules, regulations and lines of authority. It is formed by professionals who are paid for their services. Weber believed that bureaucracy’s goal was to end corruption (Weber 2012).

¹¹ The new age of empire functions on the basis of financial intervention, manipulate political agendas, impose “puppet governments”, intervene in foreign policies, tolerate corruption of political leaders in exchange of obedience to the West and favour the economic interests of the Western companies, destabilise countries through the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency), destroy social ties and divide communities through social, ideological, political or economical problems such as organise crime, terrorism, racism, migration and so on, control development in underdeveloped countries in line with Western’s interest, training and educate administrators and rulers that will care and promote Western interest in Western universities and around the world, empower local elites in representation for the West’s goals, grant legitimacy to pro-west governments and political parties, encourage “cooperation” with multinational and Western trade and abolish State controls. The United Nations (UN), International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and World Trade Organization all play their part in administering colonial logic and neo-colonialism. In the New Age of Empire, the “independent colonies” are administrated by local elites at the service of the West. The West produce an army of graduates trained in development orthodoxy to justify the underdevelopment world and superiority of the West (Andrews 2022). The governments of Britain and the U.S., who had styled themselves as the world’s policemen, have also invaded numerous countries on apparently “humanitarian’ grounds” as a way to perpetuate their colonial power (Akala 2018, 210).

In Chile, the dictatorship led by Augusto Pinochet (1974-1990), after taking the power following a CIA- backed coup d'état against socialist leader Salvador Allende in 1973. "Relations between the United States and Chile deteriorated in the 1960s due to U.S. concerns regarding the Chilean Left and the rise of Chilean nationalization of certain industries, especially copper. The prospect of the nationalization of two of the leading Chilean copper companies, Anaconda and Kennicott—both owned by corporations based in the United States—along with the growth of socialist sentiment throughout the hemisphere led the United States to overtly and covertly send aid and assistance to the Chilean Government, as well as to political parties such as the Christian Democratic Party (PDC)" (Office of the Historian, 2000) The government of Pinochet was also backed up by UK Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990). She not only lifted a British embargo on the sale of weapons to Chile imposed by the previous Labour government, but also during her government, it was sold arms that could be used for internal repression, her government also provided training of hundreds of Chilean soldiers. After the fall of the Pinochet's dictatorship, a truth commission confirmed that more than 40,000 people were tortured, 3,200 were killed or "disappeared" and over 200,000 fled into exile (Livingstone 2020).

In Nicaragua Anastasio Somoza García (1896-1956), known as Tacho, became president after a coup d'état in 1937, he was dictator in Nicaragua from 1937 to 1947 and a second time from 1950 to 1956. Anastasio Somoza along with his sons Luis Somoza and Anastasio Somoza Debayle formed the Somoza Dynasty dictatorship that governed the country from 1936 to July 1979, for a total of 43 years. Anastasio Somoza García was invited by President Franklin D. Roosevelt (1933-1945) to the United States as a way to recognize his government. During his government he was characterized by committing thousands of acts of torture, repression, mass rapes, corruption, nepotism, influence peddling, bribery and many other crimes against Nicaraguans. One of the main crimes attributed to the dictator Somoza García was the murder of the revolutionary leader Augusto César Sandino. Somoza Garcia claimed that he had received orders from U.S. ambassador Arthur Bliss Lane to kill Sandino. Another murder attributed to the Somoza government was the killing of American journalist Bill Stewart, committed by the National Guard, the body in charge of the largest repressive actions of the Nicaraguan government. This murder motivated the film "Under Fire" and had political effects that it influenced the decision of the United States government, headed by President Jimmy Carter (1977-1981), who promoted an image of a defender of freedoms and human rights, to abandon its support to the Somoza Dynasty dictatorship (Guerra 2020).

In Guatemala, General Efraín Ríos Montt, who stayed in office (1982-1983), (2000-2004) and (1995-1996), was another USA's government favorite ruler, during his first five months in power, according to Amnesty International, soldiers killed more than 10,000 peasants and he tried to exterminate the Ixil ethnic group, a Mayan Indian community, whose villages were wiped out by his forces. President Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) was General Ríos Montt's most prominent admirer. After meeting him in 1982, Mr. Reagan said the general was "getting a bum rap on human rights (...) I know that President Ríos Montt is a man of great personal integrity and commitment". However, in 2013 Ríos Montt was convicted by human rights crimes and corruption

(Linares 2018) and USA's government abandoned their endorsement to Ríos Montt's government.

In Peru, Alberto Fujimori (1990-2000), was another USA's asset, educated at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, was accused of multiple cases of corruption, fraud, misappropriation of public resources and other human rights abuses. During his government he granted 28 contracts to the company Odebrecht, company linked with other corruption cases in Latin America, for the construction, agriculture and irrigation sectors. Those contracts were overvalued by U.S. millions of dollars (Collins 2021). Fujimori and his chief of Peru's secret police, Vladimiro Montesinos were also accused of embezzling for more than 75% of the Peruvian intelligence service's funds to pay bribes to public officials and the press in order to modify his public image and increase his popular approval. Montesinos was one of the most trusted CIA's allies in Latin America. According to the Center for Public Integrity in Washington, D.C., the CIA gave the narcotics division of Montesinos's National Intelligence Services (SIN) an estimated \$10 million in the 1990s. Some of these funds, the Center for Public Integrity alleges, ended up in Montesinos's personal coffers. He is serving multiples sentences for human rights crimes, corruption and arms and drugs trafficking in a maximum security naval base prison (Berzon et al. 2005).

The list of Latin American dictators, who have amassed immense fortunes under the umbrella of the United States is endless: Jean-Claude Duvalier, president of Haiti (1971-1986); Manuel Noriega Moreno, president of Panamá (1983-1989); Jorge Rafael Videla president of Argentina (1976-1981); Alfredo Stroessner president of Paraguay (1954-1989); Humberto de Alencar Castelo Branco president of Brasil (1964-1967); Hugo Banzer president of Bolivia who held the presidency twice (1971-1978) and (1997-2001); and Juan María Bordaberry president of Uruguay (1972-1973) and head of the civilian-military dictatorship up to 1976 are some of the most representative cases in the region (Merino 2019). The resonance of "the extreme inequality and particular history that makes Latin America one of the most violent regions of the world is due in no small part to a long history of the United States supporting dictators in the region" (Akala 2018, 210).

As Andrews says if you are still questioning the complicity of the West in the neo-colonial system that rule the world today, then just examine where all the wealth generated in underdeveloped countries or ex-colonies ends up (Andrews 2022, 128): Banks and financial centres based on the West: the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Belgium, Germany, Spain, Switzerland, Luxemburg among the most important. Certainly, corruption in Latin America would not be possible without the support of the United States, Spain, the United Kingdom and others developed countries.

Conclusion and discussion

Colonialism left the new independent countries under of a situation of underdeveloped. Most of the ex colonies found themselves trapped in debt, poverty, chaos and lack of knowledge about how to manage their own institutions, not long after the mirage of their liberation, not to mention the internal divisions and inter-ethnic conflicts

creating by the colonial power that continue prevailing until nowadays in Latin America. For example, most of the conflicts in the region continue being driven between *mestizo* elites, who endorse transnational company's interest and neo-colonial powers, and indigenous groups, who continue being the most disadvantage people in the Latin American continent, and who constantly face land dispossession, natural resources looting, human rights infringements, inaccessibility of the rule of law, unfair judiciary process and the target of corrupt politicians and public servants. Indigenous people continue facing poor public services, high levels of poverty, illiteracy and social, political and economical exclusion.

According to the report on Indigenous Latin America released by the World Bank, there are an estimated 42 million indigenous people in Latin America, and it is not by chance that poverty affects 43% of the indigenous population in the region, which more than twice the proportion of non-indigenous people. Besides, 24% of all indigenous people live in extreme poverty, which is 2.7 times higher than the proportion of non-indigenous people living in extreme poverty (The World Bank 2015). Following the same report, it is considered that having indigenous parents substantially increases the probability of being raised in a poor household, contributing to a poverty trap that hampers the full development of indigenous children (The World Bank 2015).

Another important element to maintain the control in the Latin America after the departure of the colonial powers was corruption, since “the old masters needed to make sure that natural resources of their ex-colonies would end up in the hands of their own foreign companies.” (Andrews 2022, 116).

Latin American leaders have used corruption as a form of personal enrichment under the support of the Western countries, mainly the United States in the 19th and 20th centuries. The dictatorships that were established in Latin America were characterised by coming to power through coups d'état, and by the imposition of the doctrine of national security engineered by the United States that trained around 125.000 soldiers between 1950 and 1998, and the operation of the Condor Operation – strategy created by the U.S. government to wipe out the opposition regimes in the region (Merino 2019). The American strategy to tolerate corruption of Latin American governments in exchange of compliance with U.S. policies and support U.S. companies' interest has been endorsed for decades by the foreign policy of the United States, since the Monroe Doctrine: “America for Americans” enunciated in 1823 by President James Monroe; the Manifest Destiny, a phrase coined in 1845, that asserts that the United States is destined by God to expand its dominion; and not to mention many American Presidents such as Franklin Roosevelt (1933-1945) and his good neighbour policy, John F. Kennedy (1961-1963) through the Alliance for Progress, Jimmy Carter (1977-1981) and Ronald Reagan (1981-1989) among the most prominent (Williams 1957; Merino 2019).

The new Latin American leaders who came to power after the transition to democracy were supported by the United States and relied on the military forces, CIA' intelligence services, selective corruption tolerance, as well as compliance and apliance of U.S. economic policies commonly named neoliberalism (Nieto 2019).

The new age of empire functions on the basis of the financial intervention that plunder the economies of the underdeveloped world to support the interest of the West, particularly of the U.S.'s stakes. The West is not rich because its genius, democracy or capitalism. It is affluent because it has appropriated the wealth from the underdeveloped world: The rest is poor because the West is rich (Andrews 2022, 119).

In this sense, the west's economy, mainly the U.S., is nourished by the money coming from underdeveloped countries through payments of credits, cheap work force or inexpensive payments for natural resources in poor countries. The neoliberal doctrine, proposed by U.S. economists such as Milton Friedman, indicates that a successful economy must abolish controls on imports, imposing austerity to reduce the size of the state, opening the doors to foreign private investors, open free-market capitalism and reduce corruption.

However, since the end of 80s, neoliberalism in Latin America has proved exactly the contrary. Increase of wealth concentrated in a few hands, high levels of corruption, increase of poverty levels, upsurge of violence, increment of organised crime, money laundry, rise of social discontent and human suffering. Thus, this economical model is designed to keep poor countries underdeveloped in order to continue exploiting them.

Latin America countries need to change their relation with United States and the rest of the Western countries on more equal basis. Far from imposing anticorruption reforms dictated by the US and the West, and all the hegemonic institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation of American States (OAS), even the United Nations (UN), where the U.S. has a veto power to block the UN Security Council resolutions over the five permanent members of the UN Security Council - China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the U.S. The hegemonic institutions have had so far a decisive role not only in the underdevelopment of Latin America, but also in the development of corruption, since this phenomenon has been exercised selectively according to the hegemonic interest imposing an unique vision of governance, democracy, accountability and anticorruption narrative that is designed to serve the U.S. and the West's interest rather than helping to the region to unlock its potential and get on to the train to development.

This vision has a colonial and racist dress, where Latin America is perceived as inferior and unable to rule by themselves. In this framework, the creation and functioning of regional institutions without the hegemonic influence of the U.S. or the rest of the Western countries at all levels - the judiciary, the banking system, trade, public policy, the media - are of paramount importance not only for the empowerment of the region, but also for the reduction of neocolonialist influence and selective and permissive corruption in Latin America.

Supplementary material

The supplementary material for this article can be found at <https://doi.org/10.46991/JOPS/2024.3.8.081>

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Conflict of interests

The author declares no ethical issues or conflicts of interest in this research.

Ethical standards

The author affirms this research did not involve human subjects.

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